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Kentucky's small farms have two quiet legislative victories to cheer even as they say goodbye to a longtime friend in the General Assembly.

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Kentucky's small farms have two quiet legislative victories to cheer even as they say goodbye to a longtime friend in the General Assembly.

Rep. Adrian Arnold, D-Mount Sterling, who is retiring after 32 years in the legislature, shepherded House Bill 669 to unanimous approval in both chambers.

It's a fitting finale for a lawmaker who dedicated himself to opening up economic opportunities for farmers and rural Kentuckians.

What this bill does is give small farms the same access to state contracts that large suppliers now enjoy by requiring state government agencies to buy Kentucky-grown foods when they are available and meet the standards.

This is a logical extension of the millions of dollars the state has invested in diversifying agriculture to survive the decline of tobacco. Diversification won't mean much without dependable markets.

Gov. Ernie Fletcher, who has supported the continued commitment of tobacco settlement dollars to agricultural development, should sign this bill as a sign of good faith with rural Kentucky.

Farmers are especially excited about the prospect of selling to state parks. They were shaken by the firing of state parks food services director Bob Perry, who had done more than anyone in state government to promote state purchase of food from Kentucky farms.

In addition to opening the market to local farmers, this bill has a reporting requirement that will help farmers and ag planners pinpoint opportunities for growers and the gaps in availability and quality.

This General Assembly also gave Kentucky's farm-based wineries a reprieve by overhauling a bill that would have put many of them out of business.

Fletcher has already signed this compromise, which creates a licensing system that should satisfy Supreme Court demands that states treat all wine-makers the same, without putting small wineries at the mercy of large wholesalers.

Lawmakers even tossed in \$400,000 a year to promote Kentucky's fledgling grape industry.

Now, if only we could toast these victories by lifting a glass of Kentucky wine in a state park dining room.

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